

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Pärnu College

Department of Tourism Studies

Mikko Härkönen

**SPA HOTEL STAFF AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT  
TO ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES: THE CASE OF  
GREEN KEY IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA**

Master Thesis

Supervisor: Senior Lecturer Heli Tooman, PhD

Pärnu 2012

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Term
<b>CEDEFOP</b>	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for Standardization.
<b>EMAS</b>	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme.
<b>EMS</b>	Environmental Management System.
<b>ETB</b>	Estonian Tourist Board.
<b>GHRM</b>	Green Human Resource Management.
<b>ISPA</b>	International Spa Association.
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization.
<b>UN</b>	The United Nations.
<b>UNEP</b>	The United Nations Environment Programme.
<b>UNWTO</b>	The United Nations World Tourism Organization
<b>WCED</b>	World Commission on Environment and Development.
<b>WCS</b>	World Conservation Strategy.
<b>WTTC</b>	World Travel & Tourism Council.
<b>TBL</b>	Trible Bottom Line.

## INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism industry is one of the largest industries of the world. The statistics from United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) state that in 1950 the international tourism arrivals were approximately 25 million and more than half century later in year 2010 the number of international tourism arrivals reached 940 million (UNWTO, 2012). According to research by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the global travel and tourism industry will grow by 2.8 per cent in 2012, slightly faster than the global rate of economic growth, estimated to be 2.5 per cent. In 2012 international travellers are expected to surpass one billion for the very first time. It means that travel and tourism industry is expected to directly contribute 2 trillion dollars to the global economy and create about 100.3 million jobs (WTTC, 2012). The future growth of travel and tourism industry creates equally a lot of challenges for sustainable development, especially for the hotels to operate sustainable way, since according to estimations hotels have the highest negative influence on the environment of all commercial buildings (Chen, Legrand and Sloan, 2009, p.2).

Sustainable development of industries, including tourism and hospitality sector, has been an important issue globally and continues to be significant topic currently and in the future. Sustainable development is a common challenge; changes need to be made, both in the individual level as well as in the societal level. Instead of forcing others to change their manners, education efforts have to focus on raising awareness, and getting people involved in sustainable issues through participation, discussion and reflection. Establishing a sustainable future is not only a question of consensus shaping and sharing, but one of equity, recognition and the ability to appreciate differences. When promoting education for sustainable development; at the same time criticism, pluralism and individuality is being encouraged. (Wolff, 2006, p.39)

Through the literature review the author of this paper can conclude, that there are many studies of greening hotel operations to more sustainable, but very few concentrated researches and studies about the sustainable management of spa hotels. Furthermore no study have been yet conducted merely concentrating on examining spa hotels staff awareness and commitment to environmental practices in Estonia. The study can contribute positively to improvement of spa hotel staff training and education on environmental issues. Spa Hotels have significantly higher consumption on energy and water in comparison to regular hotels, because of running the energy and water consuming wet areas of the spa. Many spa hotels run their businesses environmentally friendly in general, but fail to gain environmental awards, such as eco-label, due to high water and energy consumption in the spa area.

The title of the Master Thesis is: “Spa Hotel Staff Awareness and commitment to Environmental Management Practices: The Case of Green Key in Estonia and Latvia”. The problem question of the thesis is: how aware and committed is Estonian and Latvian spa hotel staff in environmental practices in relation to standards and requirements of Green Key eco-label?

The author of this thesis paper forms a hypothesis according to the existing literature, theory, and general belief in the hotel industry sector in Estonia and Latvia: the commitment and awareness of staff members in Estonian and Latvian spa hotels is insufficient regarding the aims and requirements of Green Key eco-label.

The overall aim is to investigate how aware and committed the staff in Estonian and Latvian spa hotels certified with Green Key eco-label are to environmental practices in their daily work duties and routines regarding the knowledge, commitment, skills, and motivation.

In order to reach the objectives and the aim of the thesis paper, the author conducted several study research tasks. Theoretical background and general definitions regarding sustainable development and environmental impacts of hotels are introduced. Some of the international environmental labelling and certification programs and environmental management systems related to this thesis dissertation are being explained. The main focus and the heart of the theory part are the environmental awareness, education and

training of employees, green management, and the staff involvement in environmental practices.

The research method chosen to conduct was a qualitative study method. The interviews were semi-structured open questions with interviewees being encouraged to talk generally about the environmental management and training methods in the organization. The interviewees were managers and Green Key responsible persons' in the spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia. In addition to interviews participating observation method took place in order to collect information for the research. This method was conducted by visiting the spa hotels and observing whether the employees are working the way the spa hotel managers being interviewed claimed. For analysing the primary data content analysis method was used.

This thesis paper structure consist of two main chapters; the theoretical aspects regarding sustainable development and environmental impacts of hotels, introducing some of the main international environmental labelling and certification programmes, and the environmental awareness. The second chapter is the empirical research part, which consist of overview of Green Key eco-labelled spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia. In addition the study research methods and process, data collected, results and suggestions for improvements. The last part of the research consists of the conclusion, reference list, appendices and summary in Finnish language.

# **1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF HOTEL ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES**

## **1.1 The sustainable development and environmental impacts of the hotels**

Nowadays the world is facing a number of significant environmental threats, such as the “global warming” of the earth’s surface, over use of non-renewable resources, reduction of the stratospheric ozone layer, and global air pollution. These environmental threats have been accelerated by the exponential growth in the global population (Chan and Wong, 2006, p.481). United Nations (2012), estimate that the world’s population will increase from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050. It means that in the future the global population has to satisfy needs from relatively smaller amount of natural resources. It is a great challenge for the people to create a sustainable future for next generations. Since the pioneering work of the 1980s and 1990s, the research studies and literature related to sustainable tourism has increased tremendously (Weaver, 2006, p.11).

The term “sustainability” has been used since the early 1970s when environmental movement started to take place amongst humans in concern for the environment and overexploitation (Chen, Legrand and Sloan, 2009, p.3). The concept of sustainability first came to public attention with the publication of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in March 1980. The conservation was then defined by the WCS as “the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations”(Gössling, Hall and Weaver, 2009, pp.1–2).

Various explanations and definitions for sustainable development exist but, in principle, they all are similar to the one from 1987. It was the year when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) also called as the Bruntland’s Commission, defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present

without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environmental Development, 1987, p.40). It was one of the first reports to arise international dialogue and large-scale discussion on the environmental limitations of human growth and development, and it also awakened many industries to answer the call for change. (Herremans, 2006, p.208) It is still today the most commonly used definition for sustainable development. The message of the definition is clear; sustainable development is about creating a better place for the world’s citizens in a way that future generations can enjoy the fruits of the world in the future the same way as we today (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, pp.8–9).

Following the Bruntland’s report, the next milestone was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, often called also as “The Rio Earth Summit”, which took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. It was a conference in which 178 governments including 120 heads of state attended. The main reason and the purpose of the conference were to “elaborate strategies and measures to halt and reverse the effects of environmental degradation in the context of strengthened national and international efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries”. (Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p.19) The Rio Earth Summit turned out to be a successful event for changing the direction of sustainable development; it improved significantly the partnership between developed and developing nations, and greater participation of Non-governmental Organizations (NGO). In addition, altogether five documents were put together, one of them called Agenda 21, which has proved to be of significant importance for implementing sustainable development at the local, national and international level (United Nations, 1992; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005, p.7).

In 2002, the Johannesburg Summit – the World Summit on Sustainable Development – broadened the definition of sustainable development by including the notions of social justice and the fight against poverty (Chen, Legrand and Sloan, 2009, p.3). The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNSCD) also referred to as the Rio+20 or the Earth Summit 2012 due to the first conference held in Rio in 1992 will be organized in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. The UN is bringing together governments and international institutions and major groups to agree on several issues regarding essential issues of sustainable development, such as how to reduce poverty while promoting jobs,



clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources. Quoting Sha Zukang, Secretary-General of the Rio+20 Conference: “Sustainable development is not an option! It is the only path that allows all of humanity to share a decent life on this, one planet. Rio +20 gives our generation the opportunity to choose this path” (UNSCD, 2012, pp.2–3).

Tourism has increased vastly during the last half-century. It was after the Second World War that the global tourism started growing. In year 1950 there was 25 million international tourists, in 1970 about 160 million, in 1990 about 460 million tourists and in 2004 there was 750 million tourists. As we know this is a challenging for the global environment and it is up to the world-wide tourism operators, airlines, countries and politicians to decide where the trend is continuing (Weaver, 2006, p.2.) UNWTO (2012) estimate the international tourists’ stay-overs to reach the milestone one billion in year 2012. Keeping the vast figures of international tourists in mind, it is really good that there are more environmentally conscious companies operating in the world.

The world is moving towards green solutions and many different industry sectors are taking sustainability in earnest and investing significantly in going green in their businesses. What does it mean when we are talking about “going green”; it is associated amongst people as earth-friendly lifestyle of living. The word “green” has been identified with several dimensions, such as ecological, political, corporate social responsiveness, fair trade, non-profit, new consumerism, sustainability, and equality. (Dangelico and Pontrandolfo, 2010, p.1609) Green ideas are spreading fast through organizations: in real estate, hotel industry, human resources, communications, legal, information technology, marketing, and in grassroots groups with no formal mission but a passion to make a difference (Stringer, 2010, p.18).

United Nations Environment Programme, (2011) mentions another aspect to “green” by defining “green economy” as: “improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. Basically, as UNEP (2011) explains more simply; green economy is low-carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive. It also means that in a green economy, income and employment growth are driven by public and private investments, which aim to reduce carbon

emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

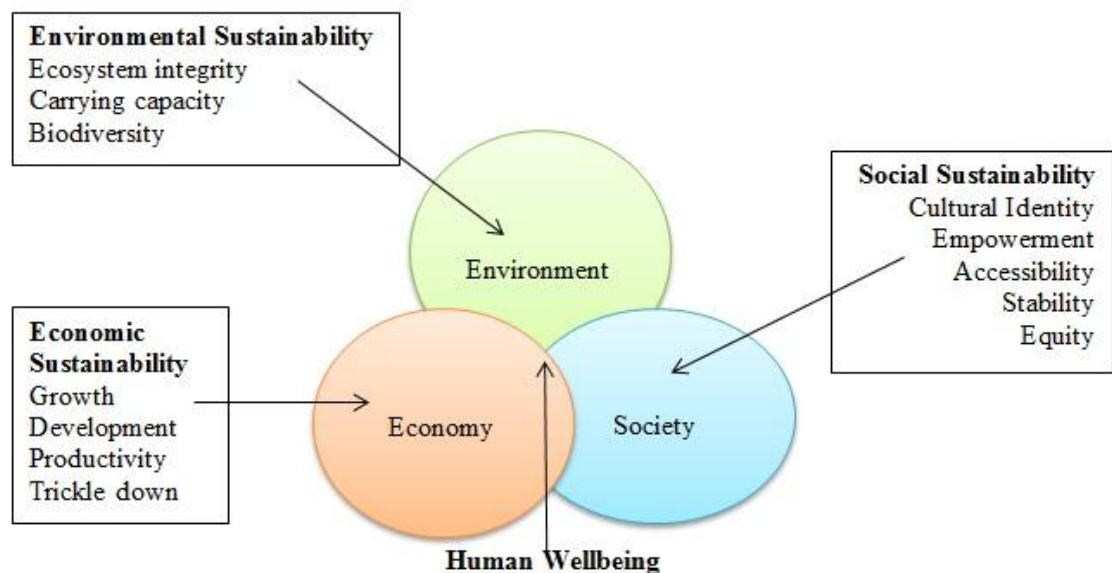
The beginning of the development for sustainability in the hospitality industry started in the early 1990s. It was after the publishing of Agenda 21 (UNEP, 2003, p.7) in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, which encouraged also the travel and tourism businesses and hospitality industry to take a step forward to more sustainable actions. These actions included adopting codes of conduct, promoting sustainable travel and tourism best practices. After a while voluntary guidelines and eco-labels and certification procedures were introduced. The general trend in hotel industry is that most of the hotels are becoming more conscious about the environmental issues and around 80 per cent of European hoteliers have some sort of environmental policy in their business. The most concerned aspects in the hotels for the environment are (Chen, Legrand and Sloan, 2009, pp.6–7):

- energy saving measures;
- water saving measures;
- green purchasing;
- waste minimization practices.

Over the last two decades the public, governments, customers and other stakeholders have become more aware of the social and environmental impacts of humans and businesses. As a result many organizations and companies showed ethical and sustainable behaviour towards environment, also named as corporate social responsibility (CSR). The concept of CSR has been defined by numerous authors and evolved during the years. Nowadays many hotels communicate for having the CSR policy, but many of them fail to communicate the initiatives taken, and even less report about the performances achieved (Grosbois, 2012, pp. 896–897). UNWTO (2012) defines CSR as “form of self-regulation whereby organizations take responsibility for their impact on society and the environment. It is a commitment to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of employees, local community and the environment”.

The three dimensions of sustainability – financial, environmental and social, often also referred as Triple Bottom Line (TBL), is an approach that reflects the company's and also many existing hotels commitment to create financial, environmental and social values. It involves being clear about the company's purpose and taking into consideration all the stakeholders. The three dimensions of sustainability can be seen be in Figure 1.0 followed by a brief definition of the three pillars. (Assaf, Josiassen and Cvelbar, 2012, p.596) Many authors have used images, graphical representations, and models to help explain, raise awareness, and increase understanding of complex concepts, as in the case of sustainability (Lozano, 2008, p.1840).

As it can be seen from the Figure 1, the three dimensions are closely linked to each other. When the sustainability was defined it was first understood that economic and social development should be environmentally sustainable. When the “three dimensions” or “three pillars” concept was introduced, it was gradually acknowledged that each of the dimensions truly has their own merits (Bedrich, Svatava and Tomas, 2012, p.5).



**Figure 1.** Three dimensions of sustainability (Lozano, 2008, p.1840)

UNEP and UNWTO (2005) have interpreted the three dimensions as following:

- economic sustainability, which means generating prosperity at different levels of society and addressing the cost effectiveness of all economic activity. Crucially, it is about the viability of enterprises and activities and their ability to be maintained in the long term;
- social sustainability, which means respecting human rights and equal opportunities for all in society. It requires an equitable distribution of benefits with a focus on alleviating poverty. There is an emphasis on local communities, maintaining and strengthening their life support systems, recognizing and respecting different cultures and avoiding any form of exploitation;
- environmental sustainability, which means conserving and managing resources, especially those that are not renewable or are precious in terms of life support. It requires action to minimize pollution of air, land and water, and to conserve biological diversity and natural heritage.

The former WTTC head and UNWTO Assistant Secretary General Professor Geoffrey Lipman presented a vision that the “green growth” is a new vision for 2050. Green growth is a strategy dealing with issues such as climate change, economic uncertainty, and poverty and vanishing resources. This new approach will involve transforming all investment, production and consumption to a low carbon, socially sustainable model for the benefit of the earth. Travelling in the future has to be based on sustainable mobility, sustainable destinations and sustainable lifestyles. Education will be playing an important role contributing to future travel (ITB world travel trends report, 2011, p. 19)

The hotel industry is not exception in taking part in the growing trend of going green. Many of the hotels have joined the green movement, but the hotel industry lack industry standard definition of a green hotel (Kiec, 2011). A recent study research by Heoc, Kanga, Leed and Steinb (2012) is bringing out that in 2007 environmental sustainability was the top priority for hoteliers worldwide. The recent economic recession, especially in 2009 forced many industries, as well hotel industry, to hold their major investments of green initiatives. However, worldwide trend of greening keeps on going and developing, and news of environmental practices appearing in hotels is not very difficult to find.

The increasing consumer awareness on environmental issues, environmental laws and governmental pressures has forced and encouraged the tourism operators and hotels to “green” their actions. Very often implementing the environmental management systems (EMS) in the hotel not only makes the business more sustainable and environmentally friendly, but also can bring more profits and motivate the staff to work more efficiently (Chan and Hawkins, 2012, p.405). The similar trend for green positive attitude can be also seen in global spa industry. The initiatives such as the development of social and environmental benchmarks for spas by GreenGlobe, the establishment of the Green Spa Network to provide environmental education for spa professionals and their encourage for sustainable spa practices, all these show that there is clear direction towards more sustainable spa operations (Cohen and Bodeker, 2008, p.348).

Many of the spa operators around the world are turning their business greener and are considering the principles of “reduce, reuse and recycle”. These principals are important for a sustainable future, reduction of carbon dioxide generation being the primary target. (Smith, 2008, p. 298) From all the different environmental impacts of tourism, the effect on water resources is one of the main important topics, especially in hotels since the tourists tend to spend much more water during holidays compared to when at home. The hotel facilities play a major role on water consumption, especially if there are wet areas, such as swimming pools and spa facilities; the water consumption tends to be much higher. Many studies have revealed that introducing water-saving technologies and a greater water-saving awareness among staff and guests have reduced significantly the consumption of water (Tortella and Tirado, 2011: p.2569).

In tourism and hospitality industry, the spa industry is in the key position to demonstrate good environmental practices. According to International Spa Association (ISPA, 2012, pp. 7–8) the spa industry embraces the three pillars of sustainability: planet, people and prosperity:

- Planet: it is the spa’s purpose and responsibility to work with the natural world to promote its healing properties while conducting business in a way that sustains the life of the planet and thus humanity.

- People: to serve others, the spa staff members must keep themselves physically, mentally and spiritually healthy by maintaining their overall health and well-being.
- Prosperity: member spa supports sustainability through education on more efficient uses of energy and resources, thus lowering the cost of operations.

This is due to reason that spas are consuming and disposing tremendous amounts of energy, water and materials. The way the spas are taking into consideration environmental practices determines their long-term economic performance, and sends the messages to customers and staff about the company's environmental issues (Bayada and Watt, 2008, pp.304–307).

To sum up it can be concluded that the sustainable development and the awareness of the public, organizations, and people continuous to increase in the future. It is only very recently, two decades ago, that the sustainability and environmentally friendly actions arose as a topic widely to the general public. Tourism and hospitality industry is growing each year and it is moving towards more sustainable ways to operate, but at the same time facing many obstacles and challenges to truly green the business. Hotel industry has been putting efforts for greening, but still do not have industry standard for a green hotel. Spa hotels especially are in an important position to truly operate sustainably since they are consuming a lot of water and energy in comparison to average hotels. Customer awareness and the education will play an important role when transforming for green growth in the future. Eco-labels and certification programmes have been used efficiently for raising the awareness and this topic will be further on discussed in the following chapter.

## **1.2 International eco-labels and certification programmes**

Ecolabelling is a voluntary initiative to enhance environmental performance during the production or consumption of products and services awarded by third party. Ecolabels have emerged as a tool for green marketing, and the main idea is to encourage businesses to operate in an environmentally conscious and ecologically friendly. Ecolabeling is expected to inform consumer choice stimulate spontaneous

environmental improvement, and diminish pollution, and to enable a healthy environmental competition among companies (Mansvelt and Robbins, 2011, p.161) One of the main reasons why the trend toward eco-labelling has increased greatly in the last 20 years, is because it is an important promotional tool for sustainable tourism and hospitality. Eco-labels have three key functions for organizations (Chen, Legrand and Sloan, 2009, p.141):

- environmental standard setting;
- third-party certification;
- marketing.

The purpose of the eco-labelling and certifications schemes in tourism and hospitality industry is to bring up the best practices for products and services. The main aim of the eco-labels and certifications are ensuring that tourism industry is conducting their practices with fewer negative impacts on the environment, on society and on the economy (Diamantis and Westlake, 2001, p.27) There are numerous different eco-labels and environmental schemes and standards in the world. Historically, voluntary environmental eco-labelling programmes have existed now for about 30 years, the German Blue Angel being the first one in late 1970's. Currently there exist eco-labels at national, European and international levels. Many of the EU member states have their own national eco-labelling programmes. (Bratt, Broman and Hallstedt, S. 2011, p.1631)

According to the Global Ecolabel Networking organization eco-labelling is defined as following: "eco-labelling is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification and labelling that is practiced around the world. An eco-label is a label which identifies overall, proven environmental preference of a product or service within a specific product/service category" (Global Ecolabelling Network, 2012).

As the consumer environmental awareness arose in the end of 80's, many companies established "green marketing" strategies in order to gain competitive advantage in their businesses. However, without credible independent third party auditing, consumers can not be fully certain whether the labelled product is a truly environmentally friendly. Green marketing increased so much that a term "green washing" evolved. When a green labelling is a tool for customers make environmentally friendly choices, green washing

is a tool to trick customers to make misinformed choice (Environmentally friendly hotels, 2012). Resulting from the green washing and tremendous increase of labels, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has put a lot of efforts to standardize the principles, practices and key issues to environmental labelling by categorizing the environmental labels to three types, which can be seen in Tabel 1.

**Tabel 1.** Three types of environmental labelling – ISO definitions

Type	Description
Type 1	a voluntary, multiple-criteria based, third party program that awards a license which authorizes the use of environmental labels on products indicating overall environmental preferability of a product within a product category based on life cycle considerations
Type 2	informative environmental self-declaration claims
Type 3	voluntary programs that provide quantified environmental data of a product, under pre-set categories of parameters set by a qualified third party and based on life cycle assessment, and verified by that or another qualified third party

Source: Global Ecolabelling Network, 2004

The three types of environmental labels differ in strength and authority, but according to ISO they share a common coal: "...through communication of verifiable and accurate information that is not misleading on environmental aspects of products and services, to encourage the demand for and supply of those products and services that cause less stress on the environment, thereby stimulating the potential for market-driven continuous environmental improvement." (Global Ecolabelling Network, 2012).

An environmental management system (EMS) is a framework for measuring environmental impacts, setting objectives, developing and implementing action plans and monitoring the results. EMS is a comprehensive environmental leading system which aims to improve the level of environmental issues continuously. The best known and most popular EMS system is the ISO 14001 standard. European Community Eco-management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is another well-known EMS system, which is more prescriptive and often used by public sector organizations. It is a challenging project to launch EMS system for an organization that do not yet have one. EMS's requires continuous improvement of environmental performance year on year. Third party auditors expect to see evidence of how performance has improved. This is where



many companies fail as it becomes more difficult year on year to show improvement. (Kane, 2010, pp.45–48)

According to Global Ecolabel Index (Ecolabel Index, 2012) there are currently 430 eco-labels in 246 countries, and 25 industry sectors. Only in the tourism, hospitality and ecotourism sector there are more than 100 eco-labels and many of them overlapping in sector and geographical scope (Font, 2002, p.197) Most of tourism eco-labels are in Europe, and particularly in Germany, but there is also global label first started by the World Travel and Tourism Council (Buckley, 2002, p.184). Needless to say, the amount of eco-labels is a vast, the author of this paper will bring up into discussion few examples of trustworthy internationally known eco-labels audited by third party; Globe, Nordic Swan Eco-label, and Green Key. In addition Environmental Management Standard (EMS) ISO 14001 will be introduced.

The European Eco-label scheme was created in 1992 in order to encourage respect for the environment in terms of consumption of goods and services. The European Eco-label is carrying the Flower logo. The label is awarded by third-party independent organisation. The European Union states that “the EU Ecolabel helps you identify products and services that have reduced impact on the environment throughout their life cycle, from the extraction of raw material through to production, use and disposal. Recognised throughout Europe, it is a voluntary label promoting excellence which can be trusted.” (European Commission, 2012)

The tourist industry received the EU Ecolabel award in year 2003. Two years later, in year 2005, also the camping sites were included as tourist facilities that could obtain the EU Ecolabel. EU Ecolabel, represents a well-known group of tools, currently applied in European countries. EU has created a panel that is working on defining the criteria for awarding a building with Ecolabel. Administrative and academic institutions have seen enormous efforts, but a suitable scheme for operators to assess the environmental performance of a building is still far from being established (Peri and Rizzo, 2012, pp.151–153).

The Nordic Ecolabel, also known as “the Nordic Swan eco-label” because of its symbol, is a tool to help companies make their products more sustainable. It was established more than 20 years ago in 1989 by the Nordic Council of Ministers. It is the official eco-label in the Nordic countries; Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Finland (Brouhle and Khanna, 2011, p.142). The purpose of it is to provide consumers a tool in order to help customers choose the most environmentally friendly products on the market. The criterion of the Nordic Eco-label is developed by using a life-cycle perspective. The Nordic Eco-label is an ISO 14024 type 1 eco-labelling system and a third-party control organ (Nordic Ecolabelling, 2012).

Green Globe is one of the best known international eco-labels worldwide. The Green Globe is based on the Agenda 21 principles of sustainable development. It was established two years after the Rio Earth Summit in 1994. It is based in Los Angeles, California having partners in Mexico, South America, South Africa, Middle East, the Caribbean and Europe. Their certification, training, education, and marketing services are currently provided in 83 countries (Green Globe, 2012). Green Globe is the first eco-label to have developed sector benchmarking indicators (SBI) to the global spa industry in 2008 with collaboration of Six Senses Resorts and Spas (Bodeker and Cohen, 2008, p.307).

Green Key is a Danish voluntary eco-label started in 1994. The Green Key programme is financed through the European Social Found. Upon joining the label the accommodation establishments can show that they are operating environmentally friendly. The Green Key has been awarded in Estonia by the Tourist Board of Enterprise Estonia since 2001. It is a cooperation between Estonia and Denmark for promoting environmentally friendly activities at Estonian accommodation institutions. The project is supported by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of the Environment, the Estonian hotel and Restaurant Association and the Estonian Ecotourism Association. In order to receive the Green Key award, in addition to the sustainability of the nature, an organization must contribute to activities related to nature and local cultural heritage. (Enterprise Estonia, 2012). The main aims of Green Key are to (Green Key, 2012):

- raise the awareness of leisure establishment staff and clients;

- increase the use of sustainable methods of operation and technology;
- run ecologically sound and responsible businesses, and thereby;
- reduce resource and energy usage.

Currently there are about 1500 establishments in 28 countries, including Estonia and Latvia, using the Green Key eco-label. In Figure 2 the Green Key logo, and other eco-labels mentioned earlier can be seen. Green Key is providing eco-labels for hotels, campsites, attractions and restaurants. The eco-label criteria for the hotels rest on five pillars (Green Key, 2012):

- education of staff, clients and owners towards increased sustainable development and environmental awareness in leisure establishments;
- environmental preservation by the reduction of the environmental impact of each establishment in the world scene;
- economical management by the reduction of consumption meaning a reduction of costs;
- marketing strategy by the promotion of the Green Key label and the establishments using the Green Key icon;
- strengthening of the tourism and leisure branch by taking responsibility broader than their individual establishments.



**Figure 2.** International eco-labels (Green Globe, 2012; European Commission, 2012; Nordic Ecolabelling, 2012; & Green Key, 2012)

To conclude it can be stated that the eco-labels and certification programmes are raising the awareness of customers, employees and organization. Tourism and hospitality is

benefitting from the eco-labelling schemes by showing a good image and at the same time the environment, economy and society is benefitting from the results. Third party auditing schemes have shown to be effective and reliable for businesses that practice responsible business. Green washing has increased, but trustworthy eco-labels and ISO have seen a lot of effort in standardisation the principles, practices and key issues relating to environmental practices. For eco-labels and certification programmes to function appropriately the human factor, meaning the employees and workers, are in inevitable role for performing excellently. This leads us to the next chapter which is about the hotel employees' awareness and commitment to environmental practices.

### **1.3 Hotel staff involvement in environmental practices**

With a global growing interest in the environment the environmentally friendly actions has also reached the workplaces. Implementation of EMS requires investment both of financial and human resources. The attitudes and behaviour of employees towards EMSs are important determinants of companies, such as hotels, to make a decision to implement and EMS into the organization. The most difficult challenge is to get people to invest emotionally in these ideas and change their behaviour. (Chan and Hawkins, 2010, p.641) It is not only the staff awareness of environmental practices, but also the consumer awareness which affects to hotel business performance. According to Liu, Anderson and Cruz (2012, p.611) consumers' environmental awareness is related to the profit of the companies. Consumers' with good and profound environmental knowledge and awareness are willing to pay more for the products or services. Thus the companies with superior environmentally friendly operations can make profit out of customer groups with high environmental awareness.

Organizations are seeking ways to save financial and environmental resources through practices, such as recycling campaigns, work-at-home programs, green procurement strategies and new building technology. The driver behind green initiatives is that they save organizations money and help enhance the profitability (Sarkkinen, 2006, p.112) To meet the challenges of greening the workplace fundamentally, employers and employees must do more than drive hybrid cars and replace light bulbs. Employers need to plan carefully how the environmentally friendly work happens, and employees will

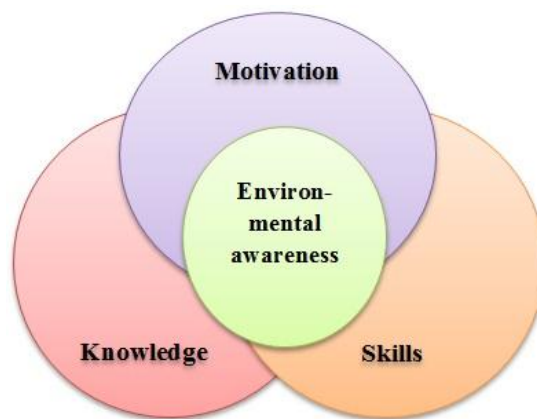
need to rethink how they work live. It means, for instance, traveling more by train, bus, and bike instead of using private car always. Green technological solutions are one step ahead, the next step and challenge is for the people to green their actions at workplace. (Stringer, 2010, pp.7–9)

Many companies are introducing environmental management systems, such as ISO 14001, Nordic Swan, Green Key and Green Globe, but are still struggling to perform successfully from environmental management perspective. One key factor for a successful environmental management is the effective environmental education and awareness training which provides employees, including all the staff members, the necessary tools to conduct in environmentally friendly manner and make environmentally responsible decisions in the organization. Instead of becoming more sustainable, the organization should obtain an environmental culture where the whole organization will change environmental attitudes and behaviours to be committed to achieving new goals. (Côte, Duffy and Perron, 2005, p.552)

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), has carried out study, Skills for green jobs, that takes a look at the skills needed to develop in a low-carbon economy. According to the study the information technology skills are very essential nowadays in working life, but there are signs that green skills will become equally important to almost every workplace (Mårtensson, 2011, p.6). Environmental awareness will help people to make sustainable choices both in the private life and at work. Environmental awareness is defined as a combination of motivation, knowledge and skills which can be seen in figure 3. The comprehensive and good level of environmental awareness enables people to make conscious choices for acting environmentally friendly way (Grosbois, 2001, p.8)

With effective EMS's and environmental leading the companies can improve their quality, increase efficiency, reduce costs in water and electricity consumption, and enhance business performance by “greening” the company's image and credibility. Other significant positive results are the improvement of environmental awareness amongst the staff and local community, the ability to meet the needs of environmentally conscious customers, and possibility to react efficiently to the authorities' demands on environmental aspects. (Sarkkinen, 2006, p.121)

When having resources and tools available, such as environmental training at work, they may enhance the individual's ability to act. When the environmental awareness of an individual is combined with the three factors; knowledge, skills and motivation, the result can be a desire and will to make environmentally friendly actions and choices in the individual's private and professional life, or even show through environmental political choices. These factors are nicely illustrated in Figure 3. It is need to stress out that environmental awareness influences several spheres of an individual's life; private, working and political life. The level of individual's general knowledge about environmental issues affects the choices in private life. Professional environmental knowledge has an impact on the actions in working life, and political environmental awareness has an influence when voting and making political decisions. (Harju-Autti, Kreft-Burman, Partanen-Hertell and Pemberton 1999, p.20)



**Figure 3.** The three elements of environmental awareness (Harju-Autti, Kreft-Burman, Partanen-Hertell and Pemberton 1999, p.21)

Companies which are aiming to go green need to see far more effort than carrying out single eco-friendly project or launching environmental awareness raising initiatives. In order to reduce company's environmental impact, only truly genuine change will be good enough. Organizational changes, particularly environmental changes in a hotel industry, are one of the most difficult tasks the managers are facing. Most significant organizational barrier to implementing environmental action relates to generally understood human factor. It is the people or more precisely the employees, in all departments of the hotel, who actually carry out the change. For instance, restaurant workers are far more familiar than hotel owners and management when it comes to

simple environmental aspects, such as the level of food wastage at hotel breakfast. (Bohdanowicz, Novotna and Zientara, 2011, p.801)

The education and training of employees in tourism, hospitality and leisure businesses are in key position in maintaining the industry's competitiveness in the international field. According to Baum (2006, p.205) the difference between education and training is that education is considered to be more of a general and developmental knowledge, while training is vocationally specific and often forerunner of certain trade or craft positions. Baum (2006) continues by explaining that, for instance, regarding the law in England students are educated in the university but frequently complete their vocational training for careers in a specialist college. Furthermore, Brunello and Medio (2001, p.309) treat vocational training in the classroom as education, and in-house training attained in the workplace, as training.

Among economic benefits of reducing energy costs, many researches have proved that environmental standards can improve human resource management. Many companies are reporting that key benefits of adopting environmental management systems include strong employee motivation and loyalty, and it can be seen in reduced absenteeism and improved work productivity (Grolleau, Mzoughi and Pecovic, 2012, p.75). When the hotel employees are not familiar with the practices that should be done to increase the level of environmental quality, or they do not understand the benefits, the hotel management cannot expect workers to act accordingly. The communication amongst the workers should reach all the employees, not only the ones responsible of each department. Efficient communication improves the team working attitude and working across organizational barriers towards common goal of enhancing environmental quality. (Vähätiitto, 2010, p.69)

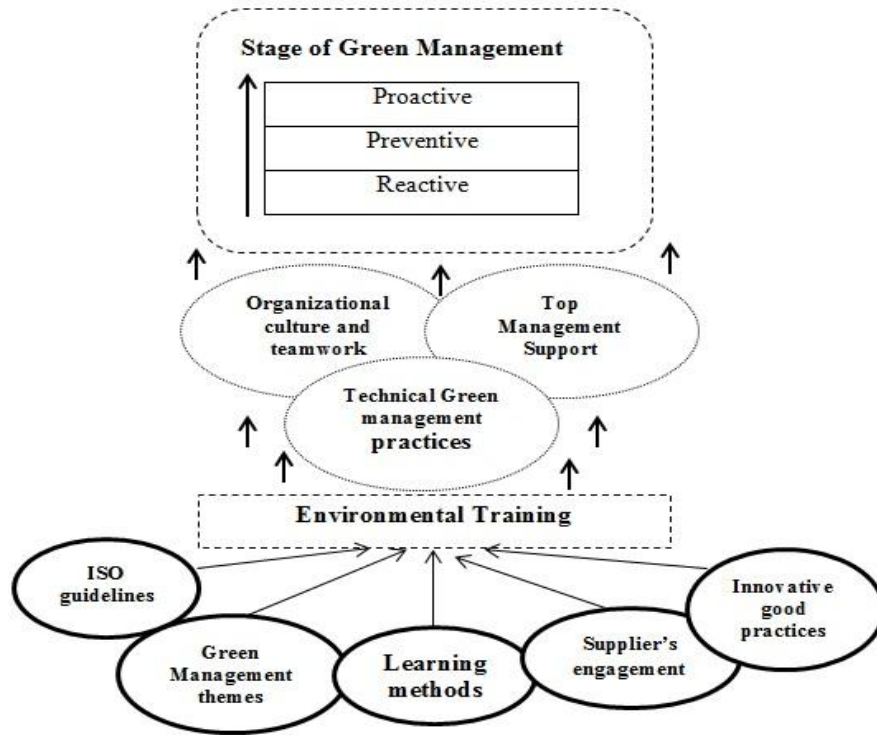
The hotel industry has been challenged by the growing need of more sustainable actions and some of the hotel companies have responded by establishing staff education and training which among many aspects also has brought up the topic of environmental impacts to their agenda. The Rezidor Hotel Group has been operating with responsible business manners since 2001. They have educational training for the staff consisting of two parts: Living Responsible Business, this 2.5 hours training is obligatory training for all staff members that aims to inspire the employees to make a difference both at home

and at work; Living Responsible Business is 1.5 hours long targeted for the hotel managers in order to ensure that they show the right example on a daily basis. Scandic Hotels company from Sweden have created “Environmental Dialogue” meetings whereby staff teams get a half day lasting seminar on a certain theme relating to sustainability. Their staff is also encouraged to create local action plans and required to go through a four hour e-learning programme consisting of four modules of sustainability. (Chen, Delgado-Krebs, Legrand, Sloan, and Tooman, 2011, p.197)

The technical aspects of green management are very important to organization, but it should be supported with management of human and behavioural aspects. The specialized literature calls it the Green Human Resource Management (GHRM). GHRM deals with the diverse practices of human resource management; recruiting, selection, training, performance evaluation and rewarding in order to fulfil the company’s green management objectives (Maguire, Redman and Renwick, 2008, p.2). Along the GHRM practices, environmental training stands out as one of the most important tools to be successful in green management in organization. Even though the environmental training has been considered important already since the 1990’s practical evidence of this has begun to emerge only very recently (Teixeira, A.A., et al., 2012, p.1).

Teixeira, A. A., et al. (2012) have created a theoretical framework relating to green management and environmental training, which can be seen in figure 4. The theoretical framework should be looked from the top down. First, there are the beginning stages of green management; reactive, preventive and proactive. These stages are being influenced by three organizational variables; “Top Management Support”, “Organizational culture and teamwork”, and “Technical Green management practices”. Environmental training is being influenced by several factors; how the organization is following ISO guidelines, the topics addressed by environmental training, the learning methods used when conducting environmental training, the support by company suppliers, and the ability of the company to adopt innovative environmental training practices.





**Figure 4.** Theoretical framework relating green management and environmental training (Teixeira, A. A., et al., 2012, p.4)

The described theoretical framework is a well compiled structure of good environmental training procedure. Anyhow, as it has been noted before by Baum (2006, p.205) and by the former WTTC head and UNWTO Assistant Secretary General Professor Geoffrey Lipman (ITB world travel trends report, 2011, p.19) education will be playing an important role and a foundation for best practices in sustainable issues in tourism and hospitality management. The education perspective is missing from the theoretical framework and the author of this study research opinion is that by adding this factor into this structure it would be good implementation for the future studies.

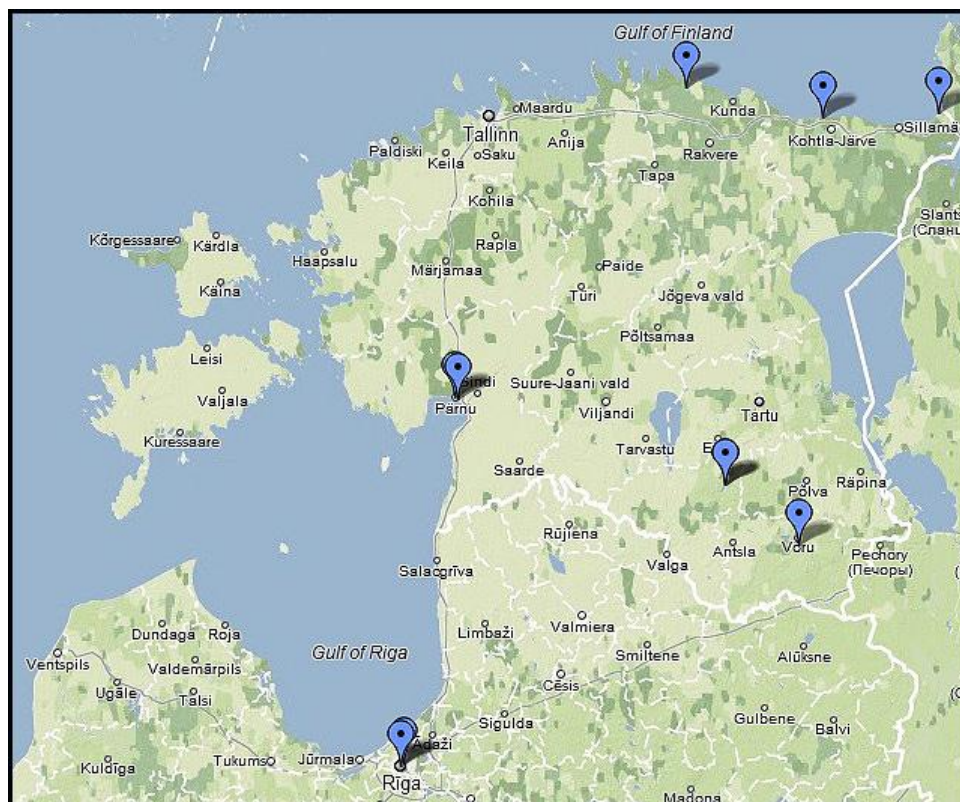
As a conclusion it can be noted that the literature review consisted of three main chapters concerning sustainable development and definitions of sustainability, international eco-labels and certification programmes, and employees' awareness and commitment to environmental issues. The study of relevant sustainability literature gave a good perspective of the historical developments and current trends and issues in sustainable development. The review of literature regarding eco-labels gives an overall insight to general principles of third party auditing, and provided understanding of some

of the most common eco-labelling programmes. Literature regarding environmental awareness, training and education, stressed the need and importance of humans as a part of the sustainability movement. Without the peoples' raising awareness and understanding of the importance of training and education for sustainability, the companies are not able to succeed as an environmentally friendly business performer. The next stage of this research is the empirical part of the study. The empirical part tries to give an answer and an attempt to gain an insight view what are those factors that motivate and make employees committed and aware of the environmental aspects in their work duties. The next stage of this research will be the overall view of the Estonian and Latvian spa hotels.

## **2. THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF GREEN KEY SPA HOTELS IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA**

### **2.1 Overview of researched spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia**

The author of this paper has chosen to investigate Estonian and Latvian spa hotels certified by the Green Key eco-label. It is important to know that spas can vary significantly, in size and location, and the spa hotels studied in this thesis have also differences. One of the criteria for choosing the accommodation providers which possess Green Key eco-label was that all of them need to be spa hotels. The International Spa Association (ISPA, 2012) defines Spa Hotel as following: “A spa located within a resort or hotel providing professionally administered spa services, fitness and wellness components”. According to authors of “Health and Wellness Tourism” textbook Smith & Puczkó (2009, p.87) spa hotel is defined as: “A spa offering hotel accommodation and normally several days of all inclusive programs designed to ensure physical, spiritual, and mental balance.” In this study the author chose to research altogether 10 spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia. Out of the 10 spa hotels 7 of them are located in Estonia and 3 in Latvia. All of the Estonian spa hotels are located in natural surroundings whereas the Latvian spa hotels are in urban city centre of Latvia, Riga. The geographical positions of the researched spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia can be seen in Figure 5. There are more accommodation providers with Green Key certification programme, but they are not included in the map.



**Figure 5.** Map of interviewed spa hotels in Estonia and Latvia in the research (Google Maps, 2012).

As it can be seen from Figure 5, spa hotels are situated around Estonia in different locations. Many of those spa hotels in Estonia are in natural surroundings next to national parks. All spa hotels in Latvia are located in Riga. According to Visit Estonia (2012) there are currently 23 accommodation establishments having the Green Key certification in Estonia. In Latvia there are 6 hotels with Green Key certificate and 3 of them can be categorized as spa hotels (Green Key, 2012) The Green Key program was launched in year 2001 in Estonia. Out of the 22 accommodation establishments in Estonia seven of them are spa hotels, which have been chosen as study objectives for this thesis research. The spa hotels researched in Estonia are presented in table 2 and Latvian spa hotels. The main goals for Green Key in Estonia are (Visit Estonia, 2012):

- promote the sustainable management principles in the tourism sector;
- increase the competitiveness of Estonian accommodation establishments;
- provide high quality accommodation for visitors.

**Tabel 2.** Estonian spa hotels certified by Green Key

<b>Spa Hotel</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Rooms</b>	<b>Green Key since</b>
Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort	130	99	2004
Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa	55	57	2005
Saka Cliff Hotel & Spa	28	35	2006
Tervise Paradiis spa hotel and waterpark	170	122	2006
Tervis medical spa hotel	80	260	2008
Meresuu Spa & Hotel	120	109	2009
Vihula Manor Country Club & Spa	40	48	2011

Source: compiled by the author

Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort is located in the middle of Estonia about 229km from the capital of Tallinn and 45 km from the city of Tartu. It was the first one to receive the Green Key eco-label certificate in 2004. The hotel is offering 99 rooms and hiring approximately 130 persons. In 2009 Pühajärve Spa Hotel won the “Green Key Annual Prize” at the “Greener Tourism Forum” organized by the Travel Trade Fair TOUREST 2009. Pühajärve Spa Hotel is offering organic for its clients and employees, cooperating with local organic farmers, and call for a more conscious consumption. The Green Key certificate is presented as one of the partners of the spa hotel in their website. (Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, 2012)

Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa is located about 4 kilometres from South Estonian city of Võru and about 257 kilometres from Tallinn. The spa hotel is located next to lake and pinewood area in the midst of nature. It was the second one to achieve the Green Key certificate in Estonia in 2005. In January 2012 a new spa and sauna centre was opened offering the guests 4 different saunas and 4 pools. The spa hotel has 57 rooms and 55 workers being the third smallest from the studied spa hotels in Estonia. Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa is not advertising on their website that the company has a Green Key certificate. (Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa, 2012)

Saka Cliff Hotel & Spa was opened in 2004 and has been build according to the requirements of 3-star hotels. The spa hotel is situated on the steep limestone coast of Northern Estonia. The distance to Tallinn is 148 kilometres. The company was recognized with Green Key certification in December 2006. The company itself is rather small size offering 35 rooms and employing 28 workers. The company is having the Green Key eco-label certification viable in their website. The company states that environmentally friendly thought and action has accompanied the hotel from the very opening. The Green Key is the way of showing its guest how to attain the harmony between quality, comfort and environmentally friendly performance. At the same time the Green Key project is meant to propagate sustainable budgeting, which should in itself stimulate the rise of commercial effectiveness of a lodging enterprise and increase the investment into development of the business and the region itself. (Saka Cliff Hotel & Spa, 2012)

Tervise Paradiis spa hotel and waterpark is four star spa hotel opened in 2004 and it is located in the city of Pärnu. The distance from Pärnu to Tallinn is 130 kilometres. The company received Green Key certification in 2006. There are 122 rooms and 170 employees. In addition to spa treatments the company has the largest water park in Estonia. The Green Key certificate is visible in the company website. (Tervise Paradiis, 2012) Tervis medical spa hotel is part of the same organization as the Tervise paradiis spa hotel and water park. The company is also located in the city of Pärnu. Tervis medical spa hotel has been providing professional spa treatment for 40 years. It is a 3-star medical spa and as well the biggest in Estonia. The hotel has 260 rooms and 80 staff members. The hotel is capable of accommodating 498 guests. Some services that can be found in Tervis Medical Spa include therapy complex, restaurant and bars, a sports centre, a conference centre, a cultural centre, a library, a beauty salon and shops. (Tervis Medical Spa, 2012)

Meresuu Spa and Hotel is a 4-star wellness hotel located near the border of Russia in the town of Narva-Jõesuu. The distance to Tallinn is 205 kilometres. Narva-Jõesuu is a small resort twon located between Gulf of Finland and Narva River. The town has a sandy beach stretched out for 13 kilometres along the coastline. The hotel has 109 rooms and is employing 120 personnel. The company joined the Green Key programme

in 2009. The spa hotel has aqua and sauna facilities and is offering numerous different treatment services. According to them Meresuu spa hotel appreciates ecological way of thinking and attitude to the nature. The company is following the principles in their activities and operations. The Green Key programme is also well presented in their company website. (Meresuu spa hotel, 2012)

Vihula Manor Country Club and Spa is a full-service manor resort located in North Estonia, on the coast of Baltic Sea, and next to the Lahemaa National park. The distance to Tallinn is approximately 90 kilometres. The manor houses consist of 2 main buildings, 25 historical buildings, and 50 hectares of parkland alongside the Mustoja River in the Lahemaa National Park. The manor house has 48 luxurious rooms and is employing about 40 people. The eco-spa is located in the other main building offering treatments with natural and eco-friendly spa products. Vihula Manor Country Club and Spa has joined the Green Key programme in 2011. The company is encouraging employees, cooperation partners, and guests to carry on environment-saving principles. Each year they organize a “Green Day” for better introducing of nature-friendly activity in the organization. With the “Green Day” the company aims to contribute to the ensuring of a cleaner future also for the posterity. (Vihula Manor Country Club and Spa, 2012)

**Table 3.** Latvian spa hotels certified with Green Key

<b>Spa Hotel</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Rooms</b>	<b>Green Key Since</b>
Opera Hotel & Spa	50	112	2008
Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija	250	571	2008
Radisson Blu Hotel Daugava	110	361	2010

Source: compiled by the author

Opera Hotel & Spa is a 4-star spa hotel located in the capital of Latvia, Riga. The hotel is located in a historical building and in the premises of the building hotels under different names have been operating since 1886. The spa centre is offering 55 different treatments, and a relaxation area with sauna, steam bath and a pool. There are altogether 112 rooms and the hotel is employing about 50 people. Opera Hotel & Spa has received the Green Key in 2008. In addition to environmental issues, the hotel is organizing a charity project. The charity project is in cooperation with ice-hockey tournaments by

giving used clothes, sport shoes, bicycles and other items to orphan house. (Opera Hotel & Spa, 2012)

Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija is the largest business and conference hotel in the Baltics. Radisson Blu Hotels and Resorts is part of the Rezidor Hotel Group operating more than 230 hotels worldwide. The hotel is located in Riga, and is a landmark in the city skyline with its 26 floors. The hotel offers also the ESPA Riga, an exclusive five-star spa facility. In 2012 ESPA Riga was awarded as the first place in the Conde Nast Traveller Readers Spa Awards for the Favourite Overseas Day Spa for 2012, and the ESPA spa has been ranked fourth in the top 30 spas around the world. The spa provides saunas, a solarium multiple steam rooms, relaxation areas and open-air vitality pool. The hotel went for the Green Key programme in 2008. The hotel is providing 571 and employing about 250 person. (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija, 2012)

Radisson Blu Daugava Hotel is also located in Riga like the other spa hotels in this study in Latvia. This spa hotel is offering a swimming pool, saunas, health and fitness centre and a beauty salon. The hotel has 361 rooms and employing about 110 people. Green Key certification the hotel received in 2010. In addition to Green Key programme, Radisson Blu hotels are having two corporate training programmes. These two training programmes are called living responsible business and leading responsible business aimed to train employees for responsible working ways. (Radisson Blu Daugava, 2012)

As a final touch, it can be shortly stated that all of the researched spa hotels have been introduced briefly. The spa hotels vary in size, location, and by the number of staff. The next step in this research is to introduce the research methodology, process and the limitations of the research study.

## **2.2 Research methodology, process and limitations**

The author has chosen to conduct a qualitative research study. The selected research method was seen to be the most appropriate for collecting the data needed for answering the research question. The term qualitative is used to describe research methods and techniques which use qualitative information, which is information in the form of



words, images and sounds, rather than numbers being more common for quantitative type of research. The qualitative method is often used when collecting detailed information about relatively few cases or subjects whereas quantitative research is often used when studying about limited information about a large number of cases or subjects. (Veal, 2011: p.232) Very often in qualitative hospitality and tourism studies, data is coming from interviews, in this study as well. In qualitative data analysis specific analytical ways are being used in order to convert the raw data into a logical explanation of the phenomenon studied. In simple words, data analysis is about making sense what the data says about the research topic (Altinay and Paraskevas 2008: p.167).

The topic of this research, environmental awareness and commitment to environmental practices, can be researched from various perspectives. Meaning that the topic could be assessed both with quantitative or qualitative approach. The research method chosen is qualitative type. The main reasons for using qualitative type as a method for this research study is that qualitative method, such as interview, gives a deep understanding and knowledge of the level of awareness and commitment to environmental practices among spa hotel staff. According to Flick (2011, p.14) another advantage is that with qualitative research, it is possible to produce detailed and exact analyses of few cases, in which the participants have freedom to determine what is relevant for them and to present it in its contexts. The disadvantage of qualitative study is that qualitative analyses takes a lot of time and the results can be generalized to the vast audience in only a very limited way (*Ibid*, p.14).

This research paper consists of qualitative data in forms of primary and secondary data. Secondary data have been collected through books, articles, online sources and journals providing the theoretical background. For the primary data collection semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used as a method to collect the information. In-depth interview seeks to probe more deeply than is possible with a questionnaire interview (Veal, 2011, p.240). The interviewees were encouraged to bring up into discussion their own perspective for what is their priorities regarding environmental aspects. All the relevant topics relating to the research study were covered in the interviews. It would have been possible to add quantitative method to this study research to question all the spa hotel staff members, but due to lack of time and

resources the author continued to approach the study only from the qualitative point of view. The interview questions can be seen in the appendices.

This research paper is based on a solid theoretical framework collected by using the secondary data. The secondary data consists of existing literature relating to the topic of sustainability, environmental awareness, eco-labelling, environmental management systems, and environmental training and education. The secondary data analysis of existing literature was reviewed in order to build up a solid theoretical structure as a basis for this research study (Veal, 2011, p.45). The research study project is partly based on the new information gathered from the primary data of interviews, in which the researcher of this study was the first user of the gathered information, the secondary data analysis of already existing information was seen as a necessary part for this study (*ibid*, p.44). Information regarding sustainability and environmental issues in the form of books was collected from the library of University of Tartu Pärnu College, and from the library of University of Oulu in Finland. In addition academic databases and online resources were used in order to collect valuable research articles and information regarding the topic researched.

The primary data, semi-structured in-depth interviews, was used as a method for new data collection activities. Altogether there were 11 interviews conducted for the study (see appendix 2.) First pilot interview was held on March 3<sup>rd</sup> with one of the spa hotel managers in order to see whether the questions formed and the interview will have preferred results. It was seen that the results were satisfying, only one of the questions were changed after the pilot interview. It was really good to conduct a pilot survey since it helps to see whether the questions were appropriate and related to the research aims (Veal, 2011, p.313). From all of the 11 interviews nine of them were face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews are relatively informal, allow an interactional exchange of dialogue and allow the researcher to encourage interviewee to bring up relevant context into discussion (Hall and Hall, 2004, p.118). Green Key coordinator from Denmark was interviewed via Skype phone. Green Key specialist of Estonian Tourism Board was sent interview questions via e-mail.

The major challenges the author faced during the data collection process was the arrangement for interviews with managers in spa hotels. When contacting the manager

responsible for the Green Key, or the manager responsible for environmental undertakings, several phone calls were made. The managers were busy, it was challenging to arrange the face-to-face interviews and to find suitable time. The spa hotels researched are geographically located in different destinations around Estonia. In order to reach them for conducting the interviews it was decided to rent a car to reach several spa hotels for saving financial costs and time. In all of the interviews with spa hotel managers a Dictaphone was used for recording the face-to-face interviews.

The first pilot interview was arranged for 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2012. Interview took place in the premises of Victoria Hotel in Pärnu. The person interviewed was manager from the Vihula Manor & Country Club. The interview was conducted in English language. Later on the interview was transcribed into text form by the author. In the pilot interview there was thirteen open-ended questions. The interviewee was asked opinion about the interview questions and according to the results and analysis of the interview process only one of the interview questions was changed. The following three interviews was organized on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012. A car was rented from Pärnu in order to reach Saka Cliff Hotel & Spa, and Meresuu Spa & Hotel. The interview was first intended to conduct in English language, but as the interviewees' level of English was not sufficient enough for interpreting the questions, it was decided to change the interview language to Estonian. The author had an Estonian speaking interview assistant in order to help overcoming the language barrier. The interview was partly covered in English language and partly in Estonian language. The interview results were not ideal due to language barrier and also due to lack of interviewees' understanding of environmental undertakings in the spa hotel. The spa hotel premises were observed and it was noted that Green Key certification was visible for the customers in the front desk of the hotel.

Third interview with manager responsible for environmental practices took place in the hotel premises of Meresuu Spa & Hotel on 14<sup>th</sup> March. The language spoken in the interview was Russian. The author had interview assistant and the questions were translated into Russian and the whole interview process happened in Russian language. All the answers were translated into English by the interview assistant. There were some challenges since the translation was not done by a professional and it affected the

translation results. However, interview results were satisfying and the most important topics were covered. It was observed at Meresuu Spa & Hotel that Green Key is communicated to customers by having the Green Key certification visible in the front desk. Also information about Green Key can be found in the hotel room information book for customers.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012 car was rented to visit Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa, and Pühajärve Spa and Holiday Resort for conducting interviews. The interview with manager from Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa was conducted in Estonian language. Another manager from the hotel was assisting in translating the answers into English language. During the same day fifth interview took place at Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort. This interview was conducted in Finnish language since the interviewee was fluent in Finnish and the authors' mother tongue is Finnish. On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012 sixth interview took place in Tervis Medical Spa. The interview was conducted in Estonian language and Tervis Medical Spa guide translated the answers into Finnish language.

The Latvian spa hotels were interviewed on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012. All of the spa hotels in Latvia were located in the city of Riga. A bus trip from Pärnu was organized for interviewing all of the spa hotel managers in one day. The seventh interviewee was manager from the Radisson Blu Daugava Hotel. Next person interviewed for the eighth interview was Opera Hotel & Spa's front office and leisure sales manager. The ninth interview was conducted with room division manager at Radisson Blu Hotel Latvia.

The last two interviews happened with specialists of the Green Key eco-label. The tenth interviewee was the Green Key coordinator from Copenhagen, Denmark. The interview took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. The interview was conducted via Skype chat option. Altogether five questions were (see appendix 1) were asked from the Green Key coordinator. The language used was English language. The very last, eleventh interview was conducted with the Estonian Tourist Board person responsible for the Green Key programme in Estonia. The interview questions were sent via e-mail on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and the answer was received on 19<sup>th</sup> April via e-mail.

For analysing the data collection summarizing qualitative content analysis method was chosen. With this method less relevant content of the collected data material will be

skipped and the data material found with the similar meanings will be used to analyse the data material (Flick, 2011, p.137). The main aim in this research was to investigate the awareness and commitment of the Estonian and Latvian spa hotel staff regarding their knowledge, commitment, skills and motivation to environmental practices. Taken this into consideration it is logical to find certain coding unites and categories for logical interpretation of the collected material. The author has chosen to categorize the findings under following themes:

- environmental awareness;
- education and training;
- motivation and commitment.

The problems and limitations of qualitative content analysis is that the quick categorization of data material may obscure the view of the contents, rather than analysing the text in its depth meanings (Flick, 2011, p.139). In this research the staff awareness and commitment was seen through the spa hotel managers' and Green Key eco-label specialists' point of view. The research was rather narrow in its nature when only 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews took place. A mixed method of using both qualitative and quantitative research method could give a more accurate and reliable research results. A questionnaire for the spa hotel staff members would have been useful in this research. Another problem was the language barrier in this research. Since the authors and the interviewees' mother tongue were not the same, the interpretation and results of the interviews were hindered.

## **2.3 Research findings, recommendations and discussion**

In this chapter the research findings and recommendations will be discussed. The findings include the analysis and evaluation of collected primary data. Primary data comes from the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the Estonian and Latvian spa hotel managers, Green Key coordinator from Denmark, and Estonian Tourist Board specialists'. The findings from the interviews conducted with the spa hotel managers and Green Key specialists reflect their experience and knowledge to environmental issues and Green Key eco-label certification programme. Following the privacy policy and confidentiality of the spa hotels interviewed, the interviewees' are represented (see

appendix 2) with codes E1 to E6, referring to interviewees' in Estonia, and L1 to L3 referring to interviewees' in Latvia. The interview questions (see appendix 1) consisted of thirteen open-ended semi-structured questions. The questions were categorized under three main themes;

- environmental awareness;
- education and training;
- commitment and motivation.

The first theme that will be discussed is education and training. As it already became evident in the theoretical part of this research, education and training is clearly building the basics for spa hotel staff to perform well regarding environmental practices. In all four open-ended semi-structured questions were asked regarding education and training from the spa hotel managers. In the attempt of ensuring the readability of this research, only the most significant findings are included, recommendations are provided, and in the end results will be evaluated. Quotations are used for explaining the results, so as to give a voice to interviewees, and to enhance readability of the findings.

Interviewee E5 explained regarding the question: How is the environmental management education and training organized in your spa hotel?

*“It can be seen in our everyday activities. It truly comes up when a new employee is hired. Training programme is organized within the first three months. Many of the new employees think that why do they need to learn about recycling and environmental issues, because they are already recycling at home. Workers do not always consider environmental practices because of the Green Key eco-label, but for the reason that it is natural for them.”*

The described answer reflects the Green Key training and education organized in most of the spa hotels which were chosen for this research study. It is mandatory to have environmental training for staff since it is one of the criteria to be accredited for the label. Four out of nine interviewees' explained that the learning process is really individual amongst employees. There are those who share sustainable lifestyle and are truly concerned about nature and those who are not interested, and for them to get the message through might take several months. Out of nine interviewees eight were well

aware of the environmental undertakings in the hotel. Interviewee E2, who had little knowledge regarding the environmental education and training, had been working four months in the hotel. During the four months, interviewee E2 did not receive any training or education for the Green Key eco-label. This indicates that there is still improvement, and guiding needed regarding environmental education and training.

Managers should be well aware of the environmental practices and act as a role model for the employees. Findings showed that when the spa hotels had received certification there was more trainings offered in the beginning. Afterwards it was up to the hotels themselves to organize the training for the staff. Green Key was seen amongst all of the interviewees as a great marketing tool and giving out message that they are concerned about the environment. Great challenge was to improve and be better regarding environmental undertakings every year.

Two out of the three spa hotels interviewed in Latvia have corporate training programmes which cover environmental topics as well. Interviewees' L1 and L2 who were along their basic work duties as well as corporate training responsible managers, had professional and up-to-date views and opinions of environmental practices. According to them the most demanding challenges are when there is high turnover of staff to keep all the workers updated. Housekeeping department was also seen as a challenge to educate and change attitudes towards waste management. It appeared amongst interviewees' in Estonia that when there are less staff and more permanent workers, it was seen that it was easier to educate the staff and raise the awareness. However, in the bigger spa hotels which have corporate training programme, such as two spa hotels in Latvia, the implementation of Green Key programme was seen to be natural and easy step. Those spa hotels which did not have EMS systems well implemented before acquiring Green Key award, it was seen to be more challenging to follow the environmental practices.

Continuing with the theme of education and training, interviewee E1 was asked: Whom do you involve in the training process of Green Key eco-label?

*“We have of course all our staff involved and we organize environmental training. We involve ETB as well. We have asked other hotels to speak in our general meetings about the experiences. It has gained a lot of motivation to our staff.”*

When it comes to staff involvement in environmental programmes in spa hotels, all of the staff members are going through the training, which is obligatory when having Green Key certification. Environmental training is organized in every three months for the new staff members. For those staff members who have worked longer period of time in the hotel, training is organized in every six months. Interviewee E1 mentioned that they also involve other hotels for general meetings to tell about their experience how Green Key was successfully implemented. It was seen as a good motivator for the staff members to hear from other hotels how they have managed to succeed in environmental issues. The findings from interviews showed that all of the managers see that staff training is essential. As the theoretical part of this research proved, education is considered to be very important part in building solid base for environmental awareness and knowledge. Two out of nine interviewees said that they have educational trainings included in the environmental training sessions. The results pointed out that there is room for more educational trainings. Instructional guidance and basic environmental information is provided to employees, but there is lack of fundamental educational trainings to staff members.

Amongst interviewees, training was seen especially important for the housekeeping department and for the kitchen since they are dealing with vast amount of waste. Interviewees' E1, E4 and E5 mentioned that they involve local stakeholders, cleaning companies and organic food farmers partly to their trainings. Cleaning companies are offering products that are environmentally friendly and offer advises on how to use the products the most efficiently. Organic food farmers provide local food, which is sustainable in comparison to bringing the food from distance. However, the challenge with the local organic food is the seasonality. In winter times it is much harder to get access to certain organic food due to harsh winter conditions. Local stakeholders can also participate in raising awareness and knowledge regarding sustainability.

It was revealed out in the interviews that one of the spa hotels in Estonia, which is marketing Green Key label on their website do not actually have the certification valid



any more. It means that this spa hotel is providing misleading information to customers, also called green washing. It is ethically wrong and if customers find it out it can have severe and harmful consequences for the image and reputation for the company. It is not only harmful for the company which is practicing green washing, but harmful also for all of the members of Green Key movement. When there is no environmental education and training provided for the employees, and the hotel continues to market themselves as a member of the Green Key, the level of quality regarding sustainable undertakings will drop down drastically. Green Key is giving the tools for good environmental practices. When the company is not following the criteria no longer certainly in near future the level of sustainable undertakings will go down.

Green Key specialist from Estonian Tourist Board (ETB) was also interviewed regarding their role in education and training of Green Key in Estonia: How is the education and training organized for Green Key in Estonia?

*“We have been presenting seminars four times per year for potential Green Key enterprises, which last 2 days, where we include also other essential topics, such as Estonian Food, eco-food, and eco-mapping. Also we have once a year get-together meeting with Green Key enterprises to share our thoughts and experiences.*

ETB as a national operator responsible for the Green Key plays an important role when it comes to guiding, leading, and motivating enterprises for sustainable undertakings. According to ETB there are few of the Green Key members who really are concerned about the environment and want to make a difference. Many of the members see other kind of benefits, such as reduction of costs and differentiation opportunity. ETB continues declaring that the members need guidance, training and motivation. The most challenging work for ETB is to raise the awareness and to make the members to see the benefits of being sustainable. According to ETB, in near future CSR policy will be implemented to criteria. The promotion of Green Key will be stronger in coming years and more members are expected.

The second theme that is brought up into discussion is the environmental awareness. This topic is important not only from the consumers' point of view, but also staff members are crucially important. When staff is aware of environmentally practices they

can much faster react to the needs of environmentally conscious customers. Five questions were asked from the spa hotel managers in connection to environmental awareness. The questions were related to staff environmental awareness and also in addition two questions about customer environmental awareness were conducted. Next the author will continue describing some of the answers received from the spa hotel managers and will evaluate the different aspects arising from the topic of environmental awareness.

Interviewee L2 commented following question: What types of actions are taken in your organization to ensure that all the employees in all departments are aware of the spa hotel establishment's environmental undertakings?

*“First of all it is the environmental training that everybody needs to go through. Then of course we do have our own environmental business notice board. Currently there is information about the Earth Hour which is approaching. Every September is our focusing month when we are trying to get some education and understanding of environmental issues.”*

Environmental awareness is essential topic of sustainability. As it was already mentioned in the secondary data of this research, environmental awareness is combining the three factors; knowledge, skills and motivation. All these aspects can be seen in the last quotation of the interviewee L2. According to interviewee L2 education and training, information and communications about environmental issues, focus environmental month, and a study trip to local recycling companies are enhancing the development of environmental awareness amongst staff members. When asked the same question from all of the interviewees, most of the interviewees mentioned the educational and training undergoing's in their organization.

It is not only about the education and training at workplace, but a wider perspective of issues when it comes for raising environmental awareness. Green Key coordinator from Denmark mentioned that they are still developing the Green Key label in Estonia and Latvia. According to Green Key coordinator there is no much difference in Estonia, Latvia or rest of the world for the reason that environmental awareness is starting to increase globally. International hotel chains are giving important impulse and messages

to the hospitality industry for sustainability. General Managers' are willing to implement environmental practices for reducing costs and to enhance the image for marketing reasons. The future seems positive for arising concern for sustainability in the hospitality industry.

Interviewee E5 explained how people are different when it comes to environmental awareness when asked: What is the timeline for the spa hotel staff to successfully be aware and committed to Green Key eco-label principles in your opinion?

*“It depends of the person. There are those employees who listen the environmental training and they say that these things I already do at home and they are really obvious and clear for me. And there are again those employees who take about two to three months to get the message.”*

The answers of interviewees regarding the expected timespan for the spa hotel staff to be fully aware of environmental issues varied amongst the managers. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the staff members are aware of environmental issues after the training is organized for them. It was also stated by one of the interviewees that the difference amongst the workers is big regarding the environmental awareness. It is obvious that people are different and some are super attentive and interested in green thinking. Interviewee L2 mentioned that since they had environmental training already before implementing Green Key programme the manager felt that employees are well aware of environmental thinking.

Interviewee E3 answered to following question: How are the guests involved to environmental performance?

*“We organize two times a year cleaning outside the hotel. We invite clients to our cleaning the environment happening and clients can for instance help to clean the beach. The clients can save some water and electricity in their rooms. Then we have some treatments in the spa that are eco-friendly”.*

Green Key has certain standards and criteria that the members need to respect. For instance, Green Key certificate must be visible to clients, information regarding environmental policy and goals need to be visible to clients. Hotel customers'

knowledge and preparedness regarding environmental thinking is in connection with the spa hotel staff environmental awareness. When there is a demand from the customers' behalf for environmentally friendly services the hotels need to answer to these demands. The hotel staff members are in crucial position to answer the needs. The more prepared, educated and trained the employees are, the better they can serve and inform those clients who wish to participate in environmentally friendly services.

As already mentioned, the demand for environmentally friendly services come from the customers. The following question was asked from in order to see which customers prefer eco-labelled hotel when choosing their holiday destination. Interviewee E3 was asked: How well is the Green Key known among foreign visitors and among local visitors?

*“European clients know the best about Green Key. German and Finnish clients usually know about the Green Key as well. Estonian clients are learning about the Green Key. Russians do not usually know anything about this Green Key.”*

The demand for environmentally services mainly comes from Europe. Very often it came up in the interviews that especially German, Swedish and Danish customers were well aware of Green Key eco-label and often chose their hotel in terms of environmentally friendly services. By having eco-labelling certification the hotels can build a competitive advantage to their competitors. In Latvia, the interviewed spa hotels had a lot of corporate clients. For these corporate clients one of the reasons why they chose coming to interviewed hotels was that these hotels had eco-label.

The last theme that will be discussed in the findings is motivation. In the theoretical part of this research employee motivation was seen to improve when implementing EMS or eco-labelling programme into organization. It could be seen for instance in increased work productivity and reduced absenteeism. Motivation is a driving force for greater sustainability. When there are changes coming into work and new things need to be learned employees need to be motivated.

Interviewee L2 explained when asked next question: What are those things that motivate staff to act responsible regarding environmental issues?

*“Basically people get motivated just by engagement. Staff knows that by sorting the garbage already at the hotel premises it will reduce our costs. It is also good reputation if you are telling somebody that you are doing green things at your work. You can be proud of yourself. You can also teach your children at home.”*

Altogether five out of nine interviewees told that saving costs is one of the main motivators for their staff to act environmentally friendly and feel committed to their work. However, due to economic recession many of the spa hotels have saved costs also by reducing the amount of workforce. This means that the existing workers need often to carry out double amount of work then they are used to before. It is in contrast to sustainable operations since when employee has a huge workload it can result to poor waste management and recycling in the hotel.

Other interesting results arouse from the interviews. For instance, Interviewee E5 said that a study trip to landfill to see where the recycled materials end up is a good motivation for their staff members to really see where the recycled material end. There has been some doubts amongst the employees that even though they recycle in the hotel, the recycled wasted will not be separated correctly in their end destination. However, interviewee E5 continued that due to lack of time, they have only managed to organize the trip to landfill once during the past few years. Interviewee L2 mentioned as well that every year they make a study trip and last trip was to paper recycling factory. This indicates that in both countries, Estonia and Latvia, a study trip to waste management companies is raising awareness and improving the motivation and commitment to environmental practices.

Interviewee E1 told that when other hotel managers come to their general meetings and tell how they have succeeded in sustainable actions it has been seen to motivate their own employees. According to interviewee L1 the best way for motivation is through the information provided in trainings. In interviewee E3's opinion protecting the nature around the hotel has been seen as an ideal motivator for their hotel workers. Interviewee E6 said that employees' health is the most important aspect. By this meaning that when they are using environmentally friendly chemicals at work it is healthy for the workers as well. Two interviewees' E2 and E4 said that they do not have any special system for motivating employees. In total seven out of nine interviewees were aware how to

motivate their employees. However, the results varied a lot and no common line was seen for motivating factors. This indicates that there is still development to do for developing the main motivating policies regarding environmental issues.

In order to get a better understanding how to motivate employees for green actions the opinion of Green Key coordinator from the head office in Denmark was asked: In general what are the main challenges to motivate staff acting environmentally sustainable way?

*“Staff must be trained and what we see that works well is when they are part of the sustainability management system and get reward for their efforts, for example if the hotel manages to reduce water consumption by 10% then the staff gets a gift, money or extra holidays. Staff needs to be motivated to be part of it.”*

According to the findings of the interviews none of the interviewees in Estonia or in Latvia made mentioned of motivating employees through rewards. This is a very valuable point that was raised by the coordinator of Green Key in Denmark. Author believes that this is an important outcome when it comes to motivating employees. The motivations for enterprises to implement eco-labelling certification programmes are mainly financial. When it comes to motivating employees, rewarding employees for a good environmental performance, such as providing small sum of money, gift, or extra holidays, can improve the general attitude and commitment towards environmental activities.

After carrying out research findings and analysis, the author will make some recommendations regarding the future development of staff awareness and commitment to environmental practices in hotel industry. These recommendations arose from the conducted study results from the theoretical and empirical research findings. The aim of the recommendations is to contribute to existing knowledge of environmental practices in Estonian and Latvian spa hotels and give some suggestions for improvement. The recommendations are covering the three main themes researched; environmental awareness, education and training, and motivation and commitment.

It came up in the research that rewarding employees with a gift, small sum of money, or extra holidays is a good practice for motivating employees. This recommendation

would have a number of benefits. Firstly, it would motivate also those employees who are not so enthusiastic about environmental thinking to reach the goals of the organization. Further, employees who will be rewarded feel that their workload is appreciated and feel more positive to contribute and participate in environmental practices. However, individual rewarding can create jealousy amongst other employees. For this reason, a well-established criterion for employee recognition is needed to avoid dissatisfaction amongst employees. The reward could be also used for recreational purposes for the whole staff so that everybody can enjoy the fruits of good results.

ETB has a rather big influence for marketing enterprises. Visit Estonia is one of the first websites where tourists find information about Estonian enterprises. In one of the interviews it was revealed that the spa hotel was marketing on their website for having Green Key, but in real life they did no longer have the certification. It is recommended for ETB to monitor the member enterprises more strict in order to avoid misleading information, and in this case green washing. It is ethically wrong to market quality label, such as Green Key when the certification period have expired and is not valid no more. Upon a situation in which customer will find out that enterprise is practicing green washing, it will result into serious negative effects on the business performance of the spa hotel.

Currently, the spa hotels have one responsible manager for the Green Key in the organization. Appointing a green responsible person amongst employees in each department would be another way for improving the awareness and communication amongst employees. The responsibilities would include communicating environmental messages, informing about green issues in general meetings, and participation in environmental discussions. In order to engage the staff for environmental changes, it is advisable that the managers are also walking the talk. Managers should be the role models for environmental issues, and can show commitment by personal choices, such as buying a hybrid car, and using bicycle or public transportation for going to work.

Employees' belief to appropriate recycling by the national waste management companies was seen as an obstacle both in Estonia and in Latvia. Finding a company who is performing well regarding sustainability was seen as a great challenge. A study trip to landfill and to paper recycling factory was seen as a great motivator for

employees in both countries. However, study trips were organized rarely due to lack of time and resources. As the study field trips to waste management companies were seen beneficial, the author recommends to increase cooperation between the hotels and waste management companies. National Green Key operators in both could also take actively part to cooperation with waste management companies to raise the awareness and importance of recycling in national level.

The findings from the theoretical and empirical part both support the idea that the importance of education for sustainability and environmental practices is not to be underestimated. As a recommendation, educational training sessions should be organized more often. This could take place for instance during the lower season of hotel activity when employees are not as busy with workload. Employees are most likely to be more receptive of educational sessions when they have less work to do. Green Key national operators can be in key role to develop the educational trainings. Higher learning institutes, such as Universities, could also be part of the educational trainings. Cooperation and workshops with Green Key national operators, accommodation establishments, and higher learning institutes could show good results in raising awareness about sustainability and environmental issues.



## CONCLUSION

The world tourism industry continues its global growth and is creating challenges for the industry to operate sustainable way, and to make changes for better sustainable practices both in societal and individual level. Eco-labelling and certification programmes have been part of the sustainable movement for about 30 years and continue to bring good practices for products and services. Environmental education and raising awareness is playing an important role in the future. Spa hotels are in important position to show best practices and to perform sustainable way since the water and energy consumption is much higher in spa hotels in comparison to hotels. An important contribution to sustainable future of tomorrow is to have education and training for environmental practices included also in the spa hotels operations.

The overall aim of this research was to investigate how aware and committed spa hotel staff in Estonia and Latvia is regarding environmental practices. In order to fulfil the overall aim, the research is based on literature review and empirical study which consisted of interviews amongst Green Key specialists from Denmark and Estonian Tourist Board, and spa hotel managers from Estonia and Latvia. Empirical findings from interviews were analysed and underlying research problem question and hypothesis can be answered. The author has achieved to find answer to the stated research problem question. The hypothesis, that the commitment and awareness of staff in Estonian and Latvian spa hotels is insufficient regarding the aims and requirements of Green Key eco-label, is supported by the results of this thesis.

The main findings from the empirical findings suggest that the awareness and commitment of Estonian and Latvian spa hotel staff is still to be developed. The criteria of Green Key is not developed yet to its fullest, but in near future more advanced and accurate criteria including CSR policy will be developed. One of the spa hotels was practicing green washing, marketing for having the Green Key label even though the

certification was not valid anymore. This is indicating serious unethical behaviour towards general principles of sustainable movement. Two of the managers interviewed were not aware about the environmental undertakings in the spa hotel. This proves that there is still education, training and guidance needed to raise the awareness and commitment. Environmental trainings was seen important and practiced in the researched spa hotels, but there was lack of educational training sessions in most of the interviewed spa hotels.

The author of this research will give few recommendations which can be beneficial for the development of environmental practices for the future. Rewarding employees financially or by extra holidays for a well accomplished work relating to environmental issues can act as a good motivator for committing to environmental practices. In addition for having one environmental manager, appointing a green responsible person among employees can increase the motivation of workers. Environmental managers themselves should be role models, encourage and appreciate workers performance, and for instance use bicycle or public transportation for going to work. ETB as a national operator responsible for implementing Green Key should monitor more strictly Green Key members in order to avoid misuse of the label, such as green washing. Arranging workshops and cooperation amongst Green Key and higher learning institutes, such as Universities, can be a great environmental tool to improve the education of environmental issues. Further, raising the awareness and knowledge by inviting other hotels who have succeeded in environmental practices as a guest lecturer to general meetings has been seen as a great motivator for employees to participate in sustainability.

There are some limitations in the research conducted. Firstly, in addition to interviews the preliminary plan was to include participant observation to the research. This way the author would have gained more valuable information how in practice the environmental practices are working in the spa hotels. Due to reasons of financial costs and lack of time, the other part of the study was not accomplished. The lack of participant observation naturally has affected the results of this research. The author faced some difficulties for arranging the interviews with spa hotel managers, and there were some language barriers as well. Fortunately, the interviews were after all arranged

successfully and the information acquired from the interviewees' can be considered good and reliable. Another limitation is that no questionnaire or interview was conducted for the spa hotel staff. The findings are coming from managers' point of view and a data collected from staff would have added further richness and originality to this research.

This research revealed valuable insights of how Green Key members are aware and committed to environmental practices. Despite the research study limitations and difficulties along the way of making the research, by completing this research the author has contributed new information regarding the environmental undertakings practiced in Estonian and Latvian spa hotels. For further studies on environmental practices regarding staff commitment and awareness, the author has few recommendations for students who want to conduct a study in this field. First of all, if choosing a topic of sustainability, it is advised to be genuinely interested about environmental issues. Researcher will spend a lot of time among environmental literature and therefore true interest regarding environmental topics will help along the research. A participative observation and a mixed method study of qualitative and quantitative research from spa hotel staff point of view will be a great contribution for further studies on environmental awareness and commitment.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1. Interview questions to spa hotel managers**

#### **Education and training**

1. Why did your organization acquire Green Key eco-label?
2. How is the environmental management education and training organized in your spa hotel?
3. Whom do you involve in the training process of Green Key eco-label?
4. How you have succeeded implementing environmental management program in your opinion?

#### **Environmental awareness**

5. What types of actions are taken in your organization to ensure that all the employees in all departments are aware of the spa hotel establishment's environmental undertakings?
6. What is the timeline for the spa hotel staff to successfully be aware and committed to Green Key eco-label principles in your opinion?
7. How is the environmental performance monitored and evaluated in your spa hotel?
8. Do the visitors appreciate the existence of Green Key label?
9. How well is the Green Key known among foreign visitors and among local visitors?

#### **Motivation and commitment**

10. What are those things that motivate staff to act responsible regarding environmental issues?
11. What challenges does the Green Key create to your staff in your opinion?
12. What are the barriers and benefits of Green Key eco-label into your organization in your opinion?
13. How are the guests involved to environmental performance?

## Appendix 2. Spa Hotels and specialists interviewed

Spa Hotel	Date	Hour	Duration
Vihula Manor Country Club & Spa	03.03.2012	10:00	35 min
Saka Cliff Hotel & Spa	14.03.2012	11:30	40 min
Meresuu Spa & Hotel	14.03.2012	13:30	55 min
Kubija Hotel & Nature Spa	16.03.2012	10:00	45 min
Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort	16.03.2012	12:30	50 min
Tervise Paradiis and Tervis Medical Spa Hotel	26.03.2012	11:30	45 min
Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija	28.03.2012	13:30	50 min
Radisson Blu Hotel Daugava	28.03.2012	11:00	40 min
Opera Spa & Hotel	28.03.2012	12:00	45 min
GK coordinator	02.04.2012	15:00	50 min
GK specialist	19.04.2012	13:00	e-mail answer

## Appendix 3. Interviewees

Interviewees	Profession
E1	Sales and marketing manager
E2	Sales manager
E3	Housekeeping supervisor
E4	Room division manager
E5	Sales manager
E6	Hotel manager
L1	Room division manager
L2	Revenue manager
L3	Front Office and Leisure Sales Manager
GK coordinator from Copenhagen, Denmark	GK coordinator
Estonian Tourist Board – GK specialist	GK specialist

\*E Refers to Estonia \*L refers to Latvia

## TIIVISTELMÄ

### KYLPYLÄHOTELLIN TYÖNTEKIJÖIDEN TIETOISUUS JA SITOUTUMINEN YMPÄRISTÖTEKOIHIN: VIHREÄ AVAIN VIROSSA JA LATVIASSA

Mikko Härkönen

Kansainvälinen matkailu jatkaa kasvua luoden samalla haasteita kestäväan kehitykseen niin yhteiskunnan kuin yksilön tasolla. Ympäristömerkit ja sertifiointiohjelmat ovat olleet mukana kestävässä kehityksessä jo kolmenkymmenen vuoden ajan ja luovat edelleen hyviä käytäntöjä ympäristöystävällisille tuotteille ja palveluille. Ympäristökoulutus ja lisääntyvä ympäristötietoisuus ovat yhä tärkeämmässä asemassa tulevaisuudessa.

Pro gradu tutkimukseni tavoitteena oli selvittää, kuinka vihreäavain ympäristömerkillä sertifioidut kylpylähotellin työntekijät ovat tietoisia ja sitoutuneita ympäristötekoihin. Tutkimuskohteeksi valittiin seitsemän vihreä avain kylpylähotellia virosta ja kolme vihreä avain kylpylähotellia latviasta. Tavoitteena oli tutkia työntekijöiden tietoa kestävästä kehityksestä ympäristötietoisuuden, koulutuksen, sitoutumisen ja motivaation näkökulmasta sekä esittää parannusehdotuksia tulosten perusteella.

Tutkimuskysymykseni oli; Kuinka tietoisia ja sitoutuneita kylpylähotellin työntekijät virossa ja latviassa ovat ympäristötekoihin vihreän avain laatujärjestelmän vaatimuksiin nähden? Lisäksi asetettiin hypoteesi: kylpylähotellin työntekijöiden sitoutuminen ja tietoisuus ympäristöasioista ei ole riittävä vihreä avain ympäristöjärjestelmän vaatimuksiin nähden. Laadullisten haastattelujen analysointiin käytettiin sisällön analyysimenetelmää.

Tutkimusmenetelmänä käytin laadullista haastattelumenetelmää. Haastatteluihin oli valmistettu kolmetoista puolistrukturoitua avointa kysymystä. Tutkimus toteutettiin

haastattelemalla kylpylähotellien esimiehiä, jotka ovat vihreän avaimen vastuuhenkilöitä. Yhteensä haastateltiin kuutta esimiestä virossa ja kolmea latviassa. Lisäksi viron matkailunedistämiskeskuksen vihreäavain vastaavaa sekä tanskalaista vihreäavain koordinaattoria haastateltiin.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella käy ilmi, että työntekijöiden ympäristötietoisuus ei ole vihreänavain laatujärjestelmän vaatimusten tasoinen. Vihreäavain laatujärjestelmän kriteerit eivät ole vielä täysin kehittyneet virossa ja latviassa ja näiden kehittelyä jatketaan tulevaisuudessa mm. lisäämällä yhteiskunta- ja yritys vastuukriteeri olemassa olevaan laatujärjestelmään. Tulokset myös kertoivat, että kaikki esimiehet eivät olleet täysin tietoisia ympäristöjärjestelmistään. Tämä viestittää sitä, että ympäristötietoisuutta on vielä parannettava. Tutkimuksessa kävi myös ilmi, että eräs kylpylähotelli virossa harrastaa viherpesua eli markkinoi vihreäavain laatujärjestelmää internetsivustollaan, vaikka heidän vihreäavain sertifikaatti ei enää ole virallisesti voimassa. Tämä on eettisesti väärin ja voi mahdollisesti vahingoittaa muita vihreäavain järjestön jäseniä.

Tutkija haluaa tuoda muutamia suosituksia esille, mitkä ilmenivät pro gradun teoriaosuuden ja empiirisen tutkimuksen kautta. Työntekijöiden motivoinnissa yritykset voisivat palkita työntekijöitä hyvistä ympäristösaavutuksista. Palkitseminen voisi tapahtua pienellä palkintorahasummalla tai ylimääräisellä lomalla. Nimittämällä ympäristövastuuhenkilö työntekijöiden joukosta lisääntyisi motivaatio työntekijöiden keskuudessa. Yritysjohtajien ja ympäristövastuuesimiesten olisi syytä olla roolimallina muille työntekijöille ja noudattaa esimerkillisesti ympäristövastuuseen liittyviä kriteerejä. Viron matkailuedistämiskeskuksen tulisi valvoa tarkemmin vihreäavain ympäristöjärjestelmän käyttöä, jotta viherpesua ei pääsisi ilmenemään. Kun nämä asiat muiden suositusten kautta otetaan yrityksessä esille niin ympäristötietoisuus ja työntekijöiden sitoutuminen ympäristöarvoihin voi muuttua parempaan suuntaan.